



HOW TO...

Create opening credits

The opening sequence of your video project sets the tone for your whole movie, so make sure you get it right first time. **Xavier Cortez** explains how **Serif MoviePlus** can help give you the best possible start

Incexpensive video-editing programs can do some impressive tricks, but many lack the precision needed to fine-tune them. The result is that effects often look gimmicky and amateurish.

Serif MoviePlus 4 is different, though. While it is straightforward to use, it offers enough precision and flexibility to make effects integrate well with your footage. On this month's DVD you will find a 10-day trial of Serif MoviePlus 4. (If you have the CD version of the magazine, you can buy the *Shopper* DVD by calling 01789 490215. Each DVD costs £2.50 including postage and packing.)

This article guides you through the process of creating an animated opening sequence. This is the ideal time to play with special effects, as they won't detract from the subject matter in the main video.

We've created our sequence using just three photos. However, you can follow this tutorial using any photos or video clips. If you're producing an opening credit for a specific project – a wedding or holiday video, say – find some video footage or a photo that's attractive but not too busy to make a background for your sequence. You'll also need a picture to cut out in an image editor; perhaps a photo that shows the star of your production.

Finally, you'll need a photo or video clip that will be used to create interesting lighting effects. It doesn't matter what it is, because you'll be obscuring it beyond recognition, but something that's busy will work best.

1 Install MoviePlus, launch it from the Start Menu and choose Start from scratch from the Startup Wizard when it appears.

The Project Settings dialog box will appear; choose DV PAL and click OK.

Your first creative task is to import your background photo or video clip. Click the Explorer tab at the bottom left of the screen, browse to the file you want to import and drag it on to Video Track 1 on the timeline.

If you've added a photo, it may not be exactly the same aspect ratio as your video, producing a black border in the Video Preview window. To fix this, click on the imported photo in the timeline and click the Show/Hide Envelopes button; this is in the bottom-left corner of the timeline, marked with three red dots joined with a line. Two extra tracks will appear on the timeline. Click on the word Transform and the Properties window will reveal the photo's Transform settings for you to edit. Handles will appear in the Preview window; the easiest way to make the photo fill the frame is to drag its corners outwards. Press Shift while doing so and you'll preserve the aspect ratio of the photo.

2 If you've used a video clip for your background, try playing it in slow motion. This may give it a calmer quality that will suit its role as background footage. To do so, simply click to select the clip on the timeline and adjust the Play speed control in the Properties window.

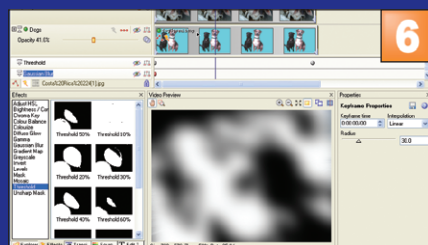
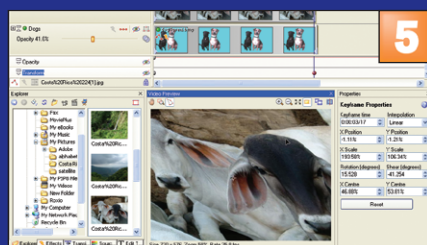
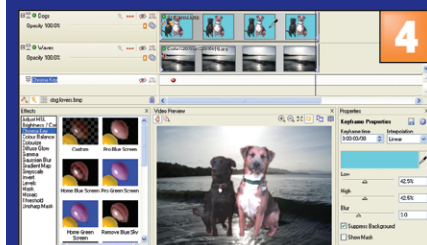
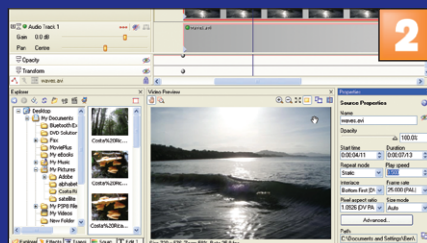
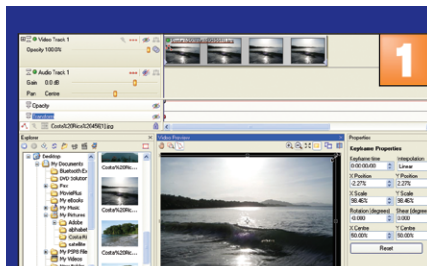
To see the results, use the spacebar to start and stop playback and click the ruler at the top of the timeline to select a point from which to play. You can zoom in and out using the mouse wheel, and return to the start of your project by hitting the Home key.

3 Next we need another image to superimpose over our background. If you have only video footage to work with, you can turn a specific frame into a bitmap. Import the video to the timeline and drag the mouse along the timeline ruler to find the frame you want to use. Capture it using the Copy Frame button, which is second from the top-right of the Preview window.

Launch Microsoft Paint from Start, Programs, Accessories and paste the frame into a new document. Alternatively, open the image file you want to use. Select the Free-Form Select tool – a dotted star icon – and draw around the edges of your subject's background to select it and hit the Delete key to delete it. It's easier to do this in small chunks rather than attempt to select the entire background in one go. Type Ctrl-Z to undo the last chunk if it goes wrong.

Your subject should be isolated on a white background. We'll be using a chroma keying effect in MoviePlus to make the background invisible. If there are areas of white in the image itself, pick a colour from the palette at the bottom that doesn't appear in the image, select the Fill With Color tool (a bucket icon) and click the background to fill it with that colour. When you're done, save the image back to the hard disk.

4 Return to MoviePlus and create a new video track in the timeline by right-clicking the blank space in the existing one and selecting Insert Track. If it appears below the existing one, simply drag its title on the left to bring it to the top.



Import the image you have just created by dragging it from the Explorer window to the new track on the timeline. Click on the Effects tab and the Chroma Key effect from the list, then drag the Custom preset to the cut-out image. The Chroma Key settings will appear in the Properties window.

You now have to set which colour to make transparent. Click the eyedropper button in the Properties window, hold the mouse button down and release it over one of the thumbnails of the imported image, making sure to capture the colour of its background.

Adjust the sliders in the Properties window to get a clean edge to the cut-out picture; 0%, 20% and 2.0 are good starting points, but experiment to get the best results.

5 Create another video track and import another image or video file. This is the one we'll be obscuring beyond recognition, so its content isn't important. If you've chosen a photo, you'll want to give it some movement. You do this by creating two Transform settings – called key frames – and morphing between them.

Click on the photo, then access the Transform track in the timeline by clicking the Hide/Show Envelopes button if necessary. You'll see a single dot on the Transform track, which represents one group of settings. Click the Transform track to create another key frame at the point where the photo object ends. Then hold down Ctrl and drag the handles in the Preview window to skew and stretch the photo. Playing the video will make the photo morph between these two key frames.

6 Click the Effects tab and the Threshold effect, and add one of the presets to the image or video to turn it into a black and white (not greyscale) image. In the Properties window, reduce the Threshold value to 0%. A track will appear at the bottom of the timeline showing key frames for the Threshold effect.

Create another key frame for the end of the clip and adjust the Threshold slider to 100%. The clip should now transform from black to white, following the contours of the original image. Select Gaussian Blur from the Effects window and drag the Blur 30.0 preset on to the same clip to soften the image into abstract patterns.

7 By default, video tracks cover whatever is on the tracks beneath them, but Blend Modes allow different tracks to interact with each other in interesting ways. In the track that contains the clip you've just created, click on the Blend Mode button (with an icon showing two blue circles) and select Dodge from the drop-down list. You should see the background and cut-out images through the abstract shapes.

If this effect is too harsh, try reducing the opacity of the abstract shapes using the slider to the left of the Blend Modes button, or try a different blend mode.

8 Text support in MoviePlus is basic, but with a little ingenuity you can still achieve impressive results. You'll need four video tracks for this, so create these now and bring them to the top of the timeline. Click the Sources tab and Text from the list, then drag Text 1 on to the topmost track. Click the Edit Text tab and type your text in to the box. Highlight the text by dragging the mouse across it and use the formatting controls above to get it to your liking.

9 If you have two lines of text, it often looks better if you animate them independently. To do so, you need to divide them into separate objects. Select the text object on the timeline, type Ctrl-C to copy, select the third video track down and type Ctrl-V to paste. Edit each text object to delete a different line from each. The two lines will become overlaid on top of each other, so open their Transform properties and drag them back into position.

Add another Transform key frame for the end point of each text object and move them to a slightly different position for this second key frame. Making the two lines of text gently drift in different directions can work well.

10 Drop shadows raise text from its background and – if the text is light – giving a dark edge increases the contrast. MoviePlus doesn't have a dedicated drop shadow facility, but we can create the same effect manually, which ultimately gives us more control.

Copy and paste both text objects on to the empty tracks below them, then hide the tracks for

original ones by clicking their Mute button (depicted by an eye with a line through it). Change the colour of the duplicated text objects to black via the Edit Text tab. Add a Gaussian Blur effect of between 5 and 10 to each one. Deselect mute for the original text tracks.

To create an effect where the text looks as if it's lit from above, select the drop shadow objects, open their Transform properties and drag them a little lower for both the start and end key frames. Offsetting them by slightly different amounts can add to the 3D effect, but try to keep the angle of offset the same for both bits of text.

If the drop shadows look a little harsh, reduce their tracks' opacity with the sliders on the left.

11 The text itself still looks a bit bland, so add a Diffuse Glow effect to each one (but not the drop shadows). Adjust the settings until you get something you like or, for a bit of added movement, create two settings for each one using key frames.

You could also experiment with different blend modes for the text. We've gone for Luminance, which makes the text adopt the colour of whatever is behind it, giving it a glassy quality.

12 Once all the elements look their best, stagger them slightly to give some shape to your sequence. Perhaps start with just the background and lighting effects, and bring in the cut-out image followed by the text, being careful to move all four text objects together; select them all by holding down Ctrl as you click on them. You can lengthen or shorten objects by clicking and dragging either end, but you might have to adjust their end key frames too. Fade elements in and out by dragging the blue triangles in the bottom corners of each object on the timeline.

You could add music at this point, too. Simply drag a WAV, MP3 or WMA file on to Audio Track 1 at the bottom of the timeline and fade it in and out as necessary using the blue triangles.

Finally, click File, Export Movie, To File to render your sequence as a video file. Choose Video for Windows (*.avi) and DV PAL to render at the best possible quality. You can import this sequence into a fresh MoviePlus project or to any other video-editing application. **CS**

